STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE LAMAR SMITH
Field Briefing of the Committee on Science on "Innovation and Information Technology: The Government, University, and Industry Roles in Information Technology Research and Commercialization"
Friday, May 5, 2006 -- 2:00 PM

It is nice to be back home in the 21st District of Texas to have this briefing of the Committee on Science.

We meet as the successful World Congress on Information Technology comes to a close next door at the Convention Center.

Our topic today is "Innovation and Information Technology: The Government, University, and Industry Roles in Information Technology Research and Commercialization."

What better place could there be to hold such a briefing than Austin, Texas -- one of the most energetic high technology centers in our nation?

As is evident from the distinguished panel of witnesses we have assembled here today, in Austin, the government at all levels, the internationally recognized University of Texas, and a diverse and dedicated private sector work together to bring innovations to consumers.

Not only do those innovations better our lives, they are also vital to our future economic prosperity.

Intellectual property industries account for half of our exports and 40% of our economic growth.

If we are to maintain a competitive advantage over China, India and the many other emerging countries, we must protect intellectual property rights and enhance our ability to innovate.

To do that, we must leverage the unique strengths of each of the three sides of this triangle: government, universities, and industry.

Unconstrained by the need to turn a profit, government can take research risks that private industry never could.

For example, no private industry could have ever put a man on the moon, but the government did.

Among many other things, the space program led to wonders like satellite television, satellite radio, and the global positioning system that now seem commonplace.

Somewhere between government and private industry, a university can concentrate resources and intellectual power more quickly than can government, but without the need to make a profit.

For example, one project that I have secured federal funding for is the remarkable Petawatt Laser Project at the University of Texas.

When it is completed, it will be one of the strongest lasers ever constructed, and it will have numerous applications. Finally, industry takes these innovations and turns them into products that make our lives better.

Without that final step, the research process can lack meaning for the typical person.

While few of us really understand how iPods and Blackberries work, many of us enjoy their benefits.

When we do, we grasp what all this research does for us.

These kinds of innovations improve our lives and that is the point of the industry contribution to the research process.

Let me digress for a moment and just touch on one other important aspect of this picture: education.

If we are to continue to lead the world in innovation, we must strengthen our math and science education.

Just a couple of months ago, I stood with other members of the Speaker's High Tech Working Group to unveil competitiveness legislation.

This legislation provided for loan forgiveness for math and science teachers as well as funding for new science Master's Degree programs to enhance America's talent pool.

I am hopeful that this legislation can be enacted soon.

I also want to commend the University of Texas for the work that it is doing in this area at the Dana Center and with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills program.

Now, turning back to the topic at hand, all three sides of the triangle, government, university, and industry are important.

Austin is a national model for the vibrant creative process that the close collaboration among them produces.

I am privileged to represent a community that contributes so much to high technology research and innovation.

And I look forward to hearing the testimony of our outstanding witnesses.